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THE

THESPIAN MIRROR.

SATURDAY EVENING, JANUARY 11, 1806.

SELECTED.

Biographical Sketch of the life of the Celebrated MRS. WIGNELL.

NOT less esteemed for her public talents than for the strict propriety of her conduct in private life, we enter on the Memoirs of Mrs. WIGNELL with pleasure, conscious that her moral rectitude must prove an exception to the general opinion entertained of Players, by the scrupulous or illiberal classes of society.

Mr. BRUNTON, her father, was formerly a *Grocer* in Drury-Lane, (London). The Drama had long floated in his imagination, superior to the produce of the East and West-Indies, and some trifling embarrassments in his affairs, suggested to him the idea of converting his partiality for the *Buskin*, which he had hitherto considered as an amusement, to a means of procuring a livelihood, if not a fortune. He took his family with him and went to Norwich, where he became a theatrical favourite, and was soon after engaged for Bath, a situation of more emolument and respectability.

His success here was equally flattering, and to the reputation of a tolerable actor, he added that of a *wou'd be Author;* he shewed a neat turn of thought, which was happily evinced one day previously to his Benefit, when he was scating on a piece of ice near Bath, in the presence of many genteel personages, among whom was the Duchess of DEVONSHIRE; being a proficient in the art, he cut his name in the ice, and was observed by the Duchess, who exclaimed, "*extremely easy.*" Mr. BRUNTON replied with great submission, "*I wish I was as easy as your Grace.*"

The generous fair one took the hint, and when she reached home, sent a twenty pound note, as a present for a few tickets to his night.

For several years he had looked with a fond hope to the fame of his daughters whom he intended to introduce on the stage, and took great delight and pains in their instruction, particularly the eldest, who is our present subject. She was regarded as a sluttish, indolent girl, by the members of the Theatre, and her presumption in soaring at once to the heights of Tragedy, it was thought would be perfectly humbled at her first attempt.

She made her *debut* in Bath in the beginning of the year 1785, as the *Grecian Daughter;* and previous to the play, the following Address, written by Mr. MEYLER, was spoken by her father:

Sweet hope! for whom his anxious parent burns,
Lo! from his tour the travel'd heir returns,
With each accomplishment that Europe knows;
With all that Learning on her son bestows;
With Roman Wit and Grecian Wisdom fraught,
His mind has every letter'd Art been taught.

Now the fond father thinks his boy of age,
To take an active part in Life's vast stage;
And Britain's Senate opes a ready door
To fill the seat his sire had fill'd before.
There when some question of great moment springs,
He'll rise—then "hear him, hear him," loudly rings;
He speaks—th' enraptur'd listening throng admire
His voice, his argument, his genius, fire!
The fond old man, in pure exstatic joy,
Blesses the gods that gave him such a boy!
But if insipid dullness guide his tongue,
With what sharp pangs his aged heart is wrung—
Despair, and shame, and sorrow make him rue
The hour he brought him to the public view.

And now what tears! what doubts, what joys I feel!
What my first hope attempts her first appeal:
Attempts an arduous task—Euphrasia's *woe*—
Her parent's nurse—or deals the deadly blow!

Some sparks of genius—if I right presage,
You'll find in this young Novice of the stage:

Else had not I for all this earth affords
Led her thus early on these dangerous boards.

If your applause give sanction to my aim,
And this night's effort promise future fame,
She shall proceed—but if some bar you find,
And that my fondness *made my* judgment *blind,*
Discern no voice, no feeling, she possess,
Nor fire that can the passions well express;
Then, then for ever, shall she quit this scene,
Be the plain housewife, not the Tragic Queen.

The unfavourable reports circulated by those who formed their opinions rather from external appearance than mental ability, operated in her favour:—the Audience expected to see a *mawkin*, but saw a CIBBER. The applause was proportionate to the surprize; every mouth emitted her praise, and she performed several parts in Bath and Bristol, a *phenomenon* in the theatrical hemisphere.

Conscious that talents may sometimes waste their beauties in obscurity, after the noise their novelty has created, Mr. BRUNTON was indefatigable in sounding her panegyric through the newspapers into the ear of London; and as the furor for tragedy, excited by Mrs. SIDDONS, had not then subsided, Mr. HARRIS engaged Miss BRUNTON in hopes of her being, by her powers, enabled to make a stand against the MELPOMENE of the other house.

This was no sooner done, than the conductors of the diurnal publications, some with a laudable design of encouraging blushing merit, but more from a wish of humbling Mrs. SIDDONS, by raising a rival, began to puff Miss BRUNTON with indiscriminate eulogium:—voice, figure, face, elegance, judgment, pathos, expression, and every qualification she was said to possess; insomuch that the public curiosity was raised to such a pitch that it was scarcely possible for her to equal expectation.

Anxious to avoid comparison, she chose *Horatio* in the *Roman Father*, for her *entree* in the metropolis, and she was received with the most liberal applause by a crowded theatre; in the fifth Act she exerted herself with great spirit and success.

But the part was only second in the Play.—HENDERSON, who performed the *Roman Father* with uncommon animation, rivetted the attention of all present, and very much clouded the fame of our juvenile candidate, whose mistaken friends had extolled her abilities in the most superlative terms. This brought on comparisons with Mrs. SIDDONS, by

which Miss BRUNTON suffered, although she was universally acknowledged an excellent actress, and, being so young, of great promise. During her first season she was very much followed, but after that her attraction ceased.

It was not long after, that our heroine married the late celebrated poet Mr. MERRY; which, (on account of the wishes of his friends) occasioned her temporary absence from the stage. After his death, she was united to the late Mr. WIGNELL, formerly proprietor of the Philadelphia Theatre, and with whom she played in America, where her talents have met with equal admiration and encouragement. Mrs. WIGNELL is now a widow, and is playing at this period, in Philadelphia.

Her person and countenance are by no means formed for Tragedy; she is short, and her features are neither delicate nor expressive, but her voice is sonorous, flexible, and sweetly melodious; her deportment is graceful, and her action judicious and picturesque.

SOPHIA WOODBINE.

A Tale of Truth from the MSS. of a Lady.

(Continued from our last.)

After the interment of my mother, a friend to my departed parents took me in kindness to his house, which he taught me to consider as my home.—His family consisted of an amiable wife and a lovely daughter, with whom I passed the happiest of my days; till my protector lost his consort: soon after which he dissolved his family, placing his little *Adela* in a boarding school, and myself under the care of *Mr. Harcourt*, and his Lady.

On my entering another scene of life, I felt a degree of melancholy, which was increased by the austerity of my new protectress' manners—used only to that ardent and affectionate tenderness, which my former guide and his family had ever expressed to me, I was at first the more impressed by her peculiarity of manners, though I soon learned to estimate her worth, who used every exertion to render me an accomplished female.

For two years and a half, we lived together in perfect felicity, and in the peaceable enjoyment of every virtuous pleasure till a new and unhappy revolution took place, by *Mrs. Harcourt's* resolution to go to Wiltshire. On my requesting liberty to accompany her, she refused assent, saying, that I must remain to be her husband's little housekeeper: and thus she left me.

For HARCOURT, as well as his Lady, did I ever maintain the greatest respect. Himself, who was conversant in all the paths of polite literature, had introduced me to the knowledge of every thing useful or ornamental: and his manners and demeanor were so completely attractive, notwithstanding his years, that I easily acceded to the plan, though the loss of the Lady occasioned me many tears.

You will probably smile when I inform you, that now, in my thirteenth year, I commenced a new course of life; being with my little information, and something of gravity, inherited from Mrs. H. put in possession of the keys, and entire care of the mansion.

The circumstances of Mrs. HARCOURT's sudden departure, and delayed return, struck me as altogether mysterious and unaccountable: and after spending a few short months of tranquillity and happiness, my surprise at her continued absence, was augmented by the gradual introduction of a Lady, and her daughter, till at length HARCOURT asked me, whether I should object to their residing in the house. Surprised at the singularity of the circumstance I only replied, that as an helpless orphan supported by his bounty, and protected by his friendly hand, I could not contradict any of his wishes: and should, for my own part, be happy to express my gratitude to himself, by any attentions in my power, to his friends.

(To be continued.)

The American Stage.

*Imitatio vitæ, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis.....*Cicero.
The Imitation of Life...the Mirror of Manners...the Transcript of Truth.

THEATRICAL REGISTER.

"'Tis with our judgments, as our watches....none
"Go just alike,...but each believes his own."

MONDAY EVENING.

The Wheel of Fortune, and the Romp.

Our avocations were such as to prevent our attendance sufficiently early on this evening, to observe the whole of the play. From what little we saw of it, however, we were not induced to regret not being earlier at the house.

Mr. *Fennel's* second appearance, since his late return to the stage, in Penruddock, did not strike us so forcibly, perhaps, as it might have done, had we not before seen *Cooper* (who is very *great* in the part) in the same character. It is probable that long disuse has somewhat blunted Mr. *Fennel's* Dramatic talents: for we observed throughout, that where *Cooper* wholly absorbed the spectator in the passion he would express, Mr. *Fennel* gave us time (if we may be allowed the expression) to *see him feel*. In short, candidly speaking, we did not consider Mr. *Fennel's* abilities so well adapted to Penruddock, as to many other characters which we can name. We must, however, in justice add, that although Mr. *Fennel's representation* was somewhat *cold*, his *conception* of the part was distinguished for its justice, chastity and correctness.

Mrs. *Barrett's* Mrs. Woodville was frequently interesting, but in many points inaccurate. Emily Tempest found a fine representative in Mrs. *Johnson*, who always excels in parts of this nature. Messrs. *Tyler* and *Johnson* were very good, particularly the latter.—*Martin's* Sir David Daw was much applauded.

Robinson was uncommonly dull and inanimate—His repetition of this character,

> ——" *And the death of a dear friend,*
> *Would go near to make a man look sad.*"

With the after-piece we were much more gratified, than with the play. Mrs. *Jones*, in Priscilla Tomboy, reminded us of our well remembered Mrs. *Hodgkinson*—She was animated, natural and easy. The *Romp* was never more justly represented. Mrs. *Jones'* songs were very fine; particularly that of

> " *My husband—and may be—*
> *A sweet little baby,*" &c.

which was repeatedly encored.

Mr *Hogg's* Watty was excellent, and without the disadvantage of a bad person for the character, would have been perfectly natural. *Watty*, though an *overgrown lad*, is not yet one of those whom *Cowper* calls,

> " *Children of a larger growth.*"

And we were induced to think that the appellation of " *Little Watty*" was misapplied.

Mr. *Johnson* was very excellent in the old Uncle—and Mr. *Tyler* was pleasing in the Captain. Misses *Graham* and *White* were tolerable. We would recommend more animation and energy to the former; and to the latter, we think more attention to her *part* than to the audience, would be an improvement. Glancing over the boxes has no good appearance, however well it may be done.

WEDNESDAY EVENING.

Jane Shore, and the Spoil'd Child.

We have seen no play recently represented on our boards, which met with a better support than *Rowe's* excellent Tragedy of JANE SHORE. Mr. *Fennel's* Lord Hastings is certainly the best character he has recently

attempted. His last scene was particularly excellent; and when he repeated the following passage, every heart sympathised in the sorrows of the unhappy Hastings, and scarce an eye remained unmoistened.

> *" Yes, Ratcliffe, I will take thy friendly counsel*
> *And die as a man should; 'tis somewhat hard,*
> *To call my scatter'd spirits home at once:*
> *But since what must be, must be—let necessity*
> *Supply the place of time and preparation,*
> *And arm me for the blow. 'Tis but to die,*
> *'Tis but to venture on that common hazard,*
> *Which many a time in battle I have run;*
> *'Tis but to close my eyes and shut out day-light,*
> *To view no more the wicked ways of men,*
> *No longer to behold the tyrant Gloster,*
> *And be a weeping witness of the woes,*
> *The desolation, slaughter, and calamities,*
> *Which he shall bring on this unhappy land."*

The ensuing scene was likewise very impressive; but in the scene of the 3d Act, with Gloster, he was not sufficiently forcible, and in one passage was imperfect.

> *" When shall the deadly hate of faction cease,*
> *When shall our long divided land have rest," &c.*

were somewhat lamely delivered. His *expression* of countenance on receiving Gloster's sentence was inimitable.

Mrs. *Johnson's* Jane Shore was unexceptionable. Her animation at hearing that Hastings had espoused the cause of the wrong'd young King, and was determined to shield him from oppression, was finely conceived; but that look of eloquence with which she heard herself proclaimed an outcast to society, immediately communicated throughout the house—and when she comes forward in her mean attire, hungry, faint and weary, she

> *" Entranc'd attention—and a mute applause,"*

The pearly tear hung on each moistened eye—and every visage *look'd admiration.* We conceived her last dress was, however, too good for her supposed situation.

Mrs. *Barrett* conceived her part very well and in the latter part of her performance was very excellent; but she *ranted* so much, that her voice was not sufficiently strong to support the exercise. She displayed great feeling in her parting scene with Hastings.

With Mr. *Tyler* we were much pleased. His Dumont was feeling, expressive and characteristic. In short, it was performed with uncommon justice and discrimination.

Mr. *Hallam* performed Gloster with accuracy. His age, *&c.* were suited to the character. *Martin*, in Belmour, was not perfectly at home.

The charming trifle of the *Spoil'd Child* was successfully repeated. We have before spoken of Mrs. *Jones'* Little Pickle, which probably could not be equalled on the American stage. Her songs, particularly that of

> *" Poll dang it, how d'ye do,"*

were encored. Mr. *Hogg*, who is always excellent in characters of the

like nature, was very much applauded in Old Pickle; and Mr. *Martin's* Tagg was perfectly characteristic. Mrs. *Simpson* was barely passable.

FRIDAY EVENING.

Othello, and Rosina.

Our confined limits, and the late hour at which we were necessitated to put these remarks to press; has induced us to be less particular in our observations on Friday evening's performance, than we should otherwise have been.

Mr. *Fennel's* great celebrity in Othello, both in Europe and America, attracted a numerous and respectable audience, who filled the house at an early hour. We entered the Theatre with the highest expectations, and are happy to say we were not in the least disappointed. It is foreign from our present purpose to designate all Mr. *Fennel's* excellencies in this character; but we can justly say of him, as has been observed of a predecessor in another part,

"His *was the same Othello* Shakspeare *drew.*"

We cannot, however, omit noticing his address to the Senate—his two scenes with Iago, in which he is excited to jealousy of his wife—his interview with Desdemona, in which he demands the handkerchief, and his concluding scene, (Act 5) which were (to use a theatrical phrase) *truly great.* In short, we are confident that Mr. *Fennel* is *deserving* of every encomium which he has received for his masterly representation of that character.

In Desdemona, Mrs. *Johnson* was very excellent. We have never yet seen this lady, when we were not pleased with her performance.

Mr. *Hallam* senior's Iago has been much celebrated, and was much applauded on Friday evening.

Mr. *Young* looked Cassio well, and played it with approbation.

Mrs. *Barrett's* Emilia had the same fault as her performance on Wednesday—a fault which is easily remedied.

We did not understand the business of the man with an embroidered coat and military hat. Was not the wardrobe provided with enough apparel for the company, that they might all dress after the same general fashion?

Martin displayed considerable ability in Roderigo: it was performed with vivacity, justice and discrimination, and though a trifling part, was of no trifling consequence to the piece.

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